

Education of the Severely Retarded Child

A Bibliographical Review

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FOREWORD

PUBLIC INTEREST in the field of the retarded child has grown very rapidly in the last few years. This acceleration of interest has come from many sources. Basically, perhaps, it represents an aroused public conscience regarding the educational needs of all the children.

One of the more striking aspects of this movement has been the development of interest in the training and education of the severely retarded group of children. This bibliography of more than 300 titles, only a few of which bear dates before 1950, is itself evidence of the pace at which this area has expanded.

The Office of Education is especially happy to have this opportunity of expressing its gratitude to Dr. Wallin for his contribution to this publication. Although he is technically in retirement, his interest and creativity in the field of mental retardation continue unabated.

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EDUCATION OF EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN AND YOUTH: THE MENTALLY RETARDED

THIS PUBLICATION is one of the series of studies by the Section on Exceptional Children and Youth on the education of mentally retarded. It is a bibliographical review of the literature on the education and training of the severely retarded, who are currently of deep concern to the schools and to communities. It is hoped that this will contribute to a better understanding of the background of the movement to provide suitable opportunities for these children.

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EDUCATION OF THE SEVERELY RETARDED CHILD

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INTRODUCTION

THE HISTORY of the education of the severely retarded child goes back at least as far as 1801, with the publication of Itard's report on the "Wild Boy of Aveyron." During the period before 1850, residential school programs began in several European countries and in the United States. By 1900 many States had residential institutions for the retarded, and many of these had school departments. There was also a fairly large number of private residential schools.

During the period from 1850 to 1900, it was usual for the middle grade, or severely retarded, and the moderately retarded to be grouped together in school, since no clear differentiation had been made between them. The lower limit for school training was at about the level represented by an I. Q. of 30. During this period, most of the educational opportunities for the severely retarded were to be found in these residential schools. Most of the writing of the latter half of the 19th century dealt therefore with education of the retarded in this mixed setting, and is omitted here.

In the closing years of the 19th century there developed considerable interest in individual differences in school children. This was a period of rather widespread experimentation in educational planning for rapid and slow learners, and many "plans" were tried out. Out of this experimentation the special class for retarded learners (the Mannheim plan) developed. About the turn of the century special classes for the retarded in public school systems were initiated and have shown a steady growth ever since.

These classes were quite heterogeneous at first, due in part at least to the lack of measuring devices. From about 1908 on, however, the

Binet-Simon Test and its many adaptations came into general use. By 1920 the individual mental test was quite generally used as a principal criterion for the selection of children for special classes. (This was, incidentally, the purpose for which it was originally devised.) Mental tests gave relatively finer distinctions among degrees of mental retardation than was formerly possible; they helped stabilize, therefore, the concepts of the three broad ranges of mental retardation, upper, middle, and lower (I. Q.'s 50-75, 25-50, 0-25, approximately) which came into rather common usage in education as in other fields during this period.

In education, these gradations eventually came to be rather closely related to a concept of "educability." There was, for example, the old dictum that "the idiot never learns to talk, the imbecile never learns to read, the moron never learns to think." On the basis of this type of reasoning, a distinction gradually arose between "educable" and "uneducable," which received considerable acceptance. The dividing line became rather generally (as expressed in I. Q. terms) at about the level of 50. The basic special class for the retarded came to be, therefore, largely composed of children in the uppermost of these three general I. Q. ranges, i. e., those who could "learn to read." The concept of the "uneducable" came, in many instances, to be applied to the two lower ranges, and educational provision for them in day schools lagged far behind. While in some programs no specific provision was made for them, in other programs they tended to become rather specifically excluded from school as uneducable. Serious question was raised in many quarters as to whether or not they were a public school responsibility at all.

This rule was probably rarely administered rigorously. Many schools admitted children with I. Q.'s below 50 if the children showed good social adjustment and minimal physical and behavioral stigmata. Nevertheless, the situation was such that a rather large number of severely retarded children living in their own homes and communities were not included in the school program.

An increasing number of parents and others felt that this was unjust. Gradually from about 1930 on, local parent organizations began to appear. About 1950 these groups consolidated into the National Association for Retarded Children. This group, together with a number of interested professional groups, brought the whole problem of the needs of the retarded into clearer focus. Although the Association's program, as it developed, became very broad, and included many aspects of the betterment of the lot of the retarded, a school program for those children previously not provided for in the community became one of the major planks in their platform.

During this period, it is interesting to note, effort became concentrated on the middle range of the retarded, whose need was the most apparent,

and who were the most numerous of the group not having educational provisions. As part of the process of identifying this group more exactly, new and often confusing terms arose.

One of these terms, the word "trainable," came into rather general use. It seems to have developed primarily in relation to the "educability" concept. Most probably it represented an attempt to bridge the gap between the terms "educable" and "uneducable." Other equivalent terms are, "severely retarded," "semi-dependent" and "middle grade." The term "middle range" or "middle grade" seems on the whole preferable, because it indicates most clearly that there is a group above and below it. The term "severely retarded" is used here primarily because it avoids the questionable implications of the term "trainable" and because it is probably more commonly used at present than "middle range." The I. Q. equivalent is about 30 to 50.

As a part of the renewed interest in this group of children, classes especially designed for them began to appear. Here again, the need had been anticipated in a few cities. St. Louis had established special classes for the severely retarded beginning in 1914; New York City, about 1930; St. Paul, about 1934, for example. More and more, however, local parent groups established special classes for them on their own initiative.

Gradually, the interest of local schools became enlisted, and classes jointly sponsored by the parents and the schools or financed entirely or largely by the schools began to appear. About the same time, State legislatures began to recognize the problem. The year 1951 witnessed passage of legislation for a statewide community school program by several States. Other States followed rapidly; at the present time about two-thirds of the States have recognized the problem either through specific legislation or by administrative interpretation of existing legislation.

The extent of activity has been extraordinary in the past few years, as this bibliography shows. Several hundred school districts now report that they have such programs. The total number of children in late 1956 had grown in cities of over 50,000 to something of the order of 9,000 in public day classes, about 7,000 in parent-sponsored groups, and perhaps 6,000 in residential schools.¹

The many special needs related to this program are also becoming recognized. Special sequences of courses in teacher preparation are under consideration in colleges and universities. Teacher certification standards are under consideration in several States. Illinois has established a special credential. Curriculum guides are being developed. The results of experience in the practical details of transportation, finance, and housing are all beginning to appear in the literature.

¹ These data are derived from Goldberg's survey, listed on page 11 of the bibliography.

There have been much experimentation and trial and error, but little research as yet. There still are many unanswered questions regarding many aspects of the program.

The titles in this bibliography are primarily therefore a record of the studies, theorizing and "action researches" in all parts of the country which are being undertaken in the effort to find answers to many questions. They are concerned with such questions as: What types of severely retarded children can be accommodated in group situations? What I. Q. range can be reached effectively? How can the children be brought to and from school safely? How much will it cost? What kind of curriculum materials should be offered? How far can modern curriculum concepts be applied to this new field? Are "units" feasible? How much can these children learn through insights and understandings? The early objectives in many cases were confined to habit formation and training in routines; more recently these objectives are being slowly broadened. There have been a few attempts to introduce modern curriculum design into the classroom.

Community educational programs for the severely retarded introduced many new problems in administration of services, transportation, housing, and so on. Parents assumed a relatively more significant role as partners in program planning. In problems such as diagnosis, counseling, early childhood training, and eventual school readiness and placement, several agencies may have participated before the child enters the classroom. All of these factors must be welded into a smooth working sequence as the child comes to school. Several of the articles in the bibliography consider these phases of the problem.

The points of view included here are of particular interest because of their representativeness and their diversity. The thinking of parents is presented in quite a large number of the reports. Other points of view include medicine, psychology, sociology, and social work, educational administration and supervision, classroom teaching, and research and statistics.

It is still too early to try to predict all of the potentialities of this new development. By no means have all the possible objectives been explored or all of the methods. Many of the serious questions today await research findings. For example, how soon can one expect to get results with such a program? The studies available have been on a very short term basis, usually two years. One question now is, then, what might a five or ten year accumulation of experiences do for the child? There is also the question of what kind of teacher preparation is required to do this new job well. What is the importance of counseling and agency cooperation in this situation as compared with other special education situations? Research activities in many parts of the country, including

the Office of Education research program, under Public Law 531, may be expected to contribute to many phases of these important questions.

It should be pointed out, too, that these studies have implications for residential school programs quite as much as for day school programs. As residential school populations have shifted in the direction of a smaller proportion of the higher range children, their school programs have tended to emphasize educational procedures more suitable for the middle range group of children.

It should be noted again that, as has so often been the case in special education, this new program has developed around a particular group of children as their needs have become recognized and differentiated. The current organization in classroom programs is in terms of separate special classes for the upper and middle ranges of the retarded. Whether these distinctions will persist in their present form is an open question as yet. Already there are studies ongoing of methods of grouping which are quite different from the present program.

The real significance of the movement lies in the fact that this is the first time this hitherto neglected group of children has been singled out on a large scale for intensive educational attention, research, and service. In the long run, these studies will clarify the understanding of mental retardation as a whole, as well as of this group in particular.

Finally, one does not always have the opportunity to observe democracy in action in as neat a package as this, sufficiently condensed in time and content to be relatively easy to follow. The concern for every individual in our society, the impact of civic groups with a zeal for betterment of our way of life, the open forum for public debate of an issue from all points of view, the concern at all levels, family, community, state, and national, and all types, legislative, administrative, public, and private, and the translation of what began as a firm conviction on the part of a few into a program of action by general consent, are all apparent here. Each component has made its own particular contribution to the whole. To those who do not understand how a democracy operates, or whose faith in it sometimes wavers, this story is a truly inspiring lesson.

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THIS is a working bibliography, brought together for the convenience of a wide range of potential users: school administrators and supervisors, college and university instructors, teachers, research students, workers in related professions, parents, and interested civic leaders. It is also a historical review, for if one arranges these papers in chronological order, he will have a fairly comprehensive description of the development in philosophy and the steps in practical planning which have been

taken with regard to this problem since the severely retarded became singled out as proper subjects for educational study.

The bibliography is related to a forthcoming publication of the Office of Education on this problem, and is a part of the source material for that publication. It seemed, however, appropriate to issue it separately and in advance for the convenience of users. The bibliography covers primarily the education of the middle range, or severely retarded child, up to June 1, 1958. While it does not claim to be exhaustive, it is believed that it covers fairly completely the published materials on this subject, experimental, theoretical, and practical, to the above date (except for those of very early date and "mixed" connotation). All the reports included represent serious attempts to throw light on this long neglected problem, although some of the materials are relevant primarily by implication. The annotations are brief statements giving the nature of the particular report, by way of supplementing the information given in the title.

The bibliography has been arranged as usual, alphabetically by the first named author, except for reports of official agencies when the publication is obtainable primarily or only through those agencies. This procedure has also the advantage of making it possible to review more quickly the accumulative status of reports of various official agencies, which would otherwise be quite scattered. Materials obtainable through the National Association for Retarded Children and not published elsewhere are listed under that organization. Other materials obtainable from the Association are so indicated in the annotations.

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